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AUTHOR Grayson, J. Paul; Williams, Deanna
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ABSTRACT

The focus group approach with black students and students of Chinese origin at York University in Ontario (Canada) was used to examine attitudes of these groups toward the concept of "visible minority." The results of eight focus group sessions conducted with 48 black students indicated that while 90 percent of the students did consider themselves visible minorities, many nonetheless regarded the term as derogatory. In previous focus groups, only half of the students of Chinese origin considered themselves members of a visible minority group. More importantly, the characteristic that might make black students visible--color--was seen as only one component of an identity that includes culture and origin. Overall, although black students supported equity measures for visible minorities and women, when confronted with a situation in which class obviously confers disadvantage, support for hiring based on visible minority and gender status alone was weakened substantially. (MDM)

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RACIALIZATION AND BLACK STUDENT IDENTITY AT YORK UNIVERSITY

J. PAUL GRAYSON
WITH DEANNA WILLIAMS

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**Racialization and Black Student
Identity at York University**

**J. Paul Grayson with Deanna Williams
Institute for Social Research
York University**

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York University
4700 Keele Street
North York, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3**

Telephone: (416) 736-5061; Fax (416) 736-5749

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Summary

In recent years, the non-white population of Toronto has been growing substantially. Such growth has been accompanied by increased use of the expression 'visible minority' in language and the emergence of legislation designed to remove systemic barriers that might be faced by visible minorities in the labour market.

While it is generally assumed that the meaning of the expression visible minority is self-evident, studies conducted at York University indicate that this is not the case. For example, only half of the students of Chinese origin regard themselves as members of a visible minority group. While the black students studied in this report do consider themselves visible minorities, many nonetheless regard the term as derogatory. More importantly, the characteristic that might make black students visible - colour - is seen as only one component of an identity that includes culture and origin. Overall, although black students support employment equity measures for visible minorities and women, when confronted with a situation in which class obviously confers disadvantage, support for hiring based on visible minority and gender statuses alone is weakened substantially.

Introduction

In common parlance and in law it may be assumed that the meaning of the expression 'visible minority' is self-evident. As a result, various non-white groups are included in the same visible minority category. Recently, legislation based on the assumed self-evidential nature of 'visible minority' has been put in place to ensure that individuals so defined do not encounter systemic barriers with regard to participation in the work force.

While the intent of such measures may be laudable, we do not know if those who legislation is designed to protect accept, or agree with, their visible minority label. Nor do we know if those so designated view visible minority status in the same way as legislators and others, such as journalists and researchers. Similarly, we do not know if racial characteristics, that form the basis of visible minority designations, are paramount in the self-identities of members of various groups. Finally, it is unclear whether individuals classified as visible minorities believe that this status results in greater disadvantage than gender and class.

Full answers to these questions will not be given in this report. Instead, attention will focus on first year black students at York University and their views on some of the issues raised by these questions. It is envisaged that a larger research project will eventually deal with the same questions at Toronto-wide and provincial levels. In essence, this report can be viewed as a first step in this larger research project.

In this report, through an examination of administrative records, results of student surveys, and focus group meetings, it will be shown that while the majority of black students studied considered themselves members of visible minority groups, many saw the label as derogatory. Moreover, most regarded being black as only one component of an identity that also included culture and origin. As a result, it can be argued that the racial and ethnic identities of black students do not generally reflect the overall racialization process, as manifested in language and law, that result in the application of the visible minority label. Finally, while most students supported affirmative action¹ based on race and gender, when race and gender were seen in conjunction with disadvantage associated with class, student support for affirmative action based on race and gender was less certain.

Analysis will begin with a discussion of the general process of racialization and the way in which this process is evident in language and law in Ontario. Then attention will shift to some problems with terms such as race, ethnicity, and visible minority. Thereafter information obtained from administrative records, student surveys, and focus group meetings with black students will be examined to determine the amount of light these sources can shed on answers to questions noted above.

¹ The expression 'affirmative action' rather than 'employment equity' was used because students are more familiar with the former.

Although analysis is initially based on the notion of racialization, in the examination of focus group materials, attempts have been made to allow students to speak for themselves. In other words, to the extent possible, instead of selectively using students' discussions to verify existing theoretical positions, conclusions reached with regard to themes that emerged in group discussions build outwards from what students say. In this regard the research is different from that conducted by writers such as Essed (1990;1991) who believe that participants in such research manifest false consciousness if they do not interpret social events in the same way as the researcher.

Racialization in Language

In their book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant characterize 'racialization' as the "extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (1986:64). As an illustration they note that by the end of the seventeenth century, in the American colonies, as a result of slavery, individuals who had been Ibo, Yoruba, Fulani, and so on, were stripped of their identities and re-defined as 'black'. At the same time, European colonists, despite differences in origin and faith, increasingly viewed themselves as 'white' in colour (1986:64). As another example of racialization Omi and Winant note that an 1854 decision of the California Supreme Court re-defined Chinese as 'Indian' thereby denying them the political rights enjoyed by whites (1986:75). More recently the designation 'Asian American' emerged from the racial confrontations of the 1960s in the United States.

Racialization not only involves the imposition of definitions on the less powerful. In contemporary British politics, for example, the term 'black' is used to describe all non-whites; however, the category arose because both Asian and Afro-Caribbean youth accepted the term as a badge of self-identity (Omi and Winant, 1986:61). In addition, racially identifiable groups with limited power do not mutely accept processes of racialization that might work to their detriment. Confrontations and legal struggles that frequently emerge between different racial groups clearly indicate the contrary. Conversely, with varying degrees of intensity, racial minorities may strive to de-racialize existing relationships, practices, or groups. Such is the current case in South Africa.

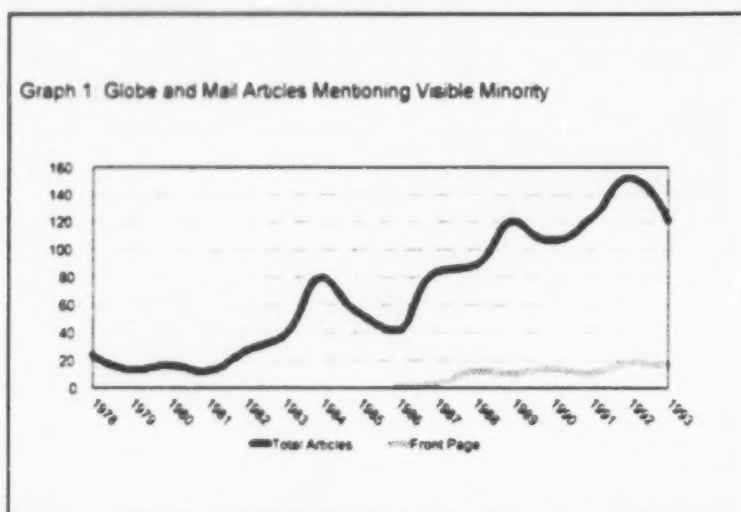
In Canada in general, and in Toronto in particular, there has been a recent and radical increase in the number of immigrants from areas of the globe with substantial non-white populations. For example, between 1981-91 the numbers of African and Middle Eastern immigrants to Canada increased by approximately 400%; Asian/Pacific immigrants by 300%; and Central/South American immigrants by 200%. Over the same period the number of immigrants from the United States and Europe remained relatively constant. As a result of recent immigration patterns it is estimated that in 1991 25% of the population of Metro Toronto was made up of 'visible minorities'. By 2001 the figure will be 45% (Samuel, 1992:34-35).

Although the point at which the category 'visible minority' first entered the lexicon of Canadians is uncertain, its increased use has paralleled growth in the numbers of immigrants from countries with large non-white populations.² As seen in Table 1, the number of *Globe and Mail* articles in which the expression was used grew from approximately 20 in 1978 to 120 in 1993 (Grayson, 1994:1). Consistent with the definition provided by Omi and Winant, the period of increased immigration from non-white countries has resulted in the increased use of an expression, visible minority, that may be viewed as part of a racialization process.

Racialization in Law

The process of racialization can be seen in law as well as in language. For example, in 1986, Bill C62, an Act Respecting Employment Equity, with the objective of achieving "equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability" (quoted in Boxhill, nd:1), was passed by the Canadian House of Commons. More specifically, the Act is designed to deal with systemic barriers that may be encountered in federal, or federally supported, institutions by, among others, aboriginal peoples and individuals who in terms of colour or race are 'visible minority' members. In Ontario, proposed legislation (Bill 79) has the same intent but will be applicable to both the public and private sectors.

Graph 1: *Globe and Mail* Articles Mentioning Visible Minority



² There is an extensive literature on 'minority groups' and 'ethnic groups' which covers such issues as minority-majority social process and interaction patterns; integration, assimilation; acculturation; cultural retention; identity; and marginalization. The literature dealing with the meaning of 'visible minority' for those to whom the expression is applied, however, appears to be small and limited in scope. A key word search in Yorkline, a record of York University's library holdings, produced only 16 references. A brief examination of Sociofile, a listing of abstracts of articles from sociological journals, produced fewer than ten items in the category 'visible minority'. Many of these references deal with government policy and implementation of equity measures concerning visible minorities. In these, the definition of visible minority appears to be taken for granted.

While both Bill C62 and Bill 79 can be viewed as attempts to assist individuals who because of characteristics such as race may be disadvantaged in terms of employment, both nonetheless contribute to, and are manifestations of, the process of racialization. Both involve treating individuals of varying races and ethnicities as one visible minority.³ It should also be noted that both ignore class barriers that cut across racial lines and the fact that not all non-whites are disadvantaged in terms of income and job opportunities.⁴

The Social Construction of Race, Ethnicity, and Visible Minority

As well as overlooking important racial and ethnic differences among groups, the problem with the use of categories, such as visible minority, is that it ignores the fact that phenomena such as race, ethnicity, colour, and visible minority are social constructs - they do not exist in some 'objective' sense. As a result, while legislators may have a clear idea of what they mean by, for example, visible minority, the individuals the legislation is designed to assist may have different ideas. The general process operative here has been identified by Figueroa in a discussion of ethnicity (1991:55-56).

Any 'in-group' identification at least implicitly involves the identifying, categorizing and defining of an 'out-group' even if only an undifferentiated one. But this other-identification does not necessarily tally with the way those others identify themselves. When we look at others and refer to them as this or that 'ethnic group', we are involved in an interpretive process which does not necessarily respond to the 'objective facts' nor to the interpretive process of those others.

What Figueroa says of ethnicity applies equally to race and visible minority. Those we classify as members of racial groups and/or visible minorities, for whatever reason, may not regard themselves in the same way. In addition, for related reasons, they may disagree with both the premises underlying, and the practices embodied in, different legislation.

As proof of these possibilities, in a series of studies carried out at York University, it was found that only about one half of students who spoke Chinese in the family when growing up considered themselves visible minorities (Grayson, 1994). Through a number of focus group meetings it was possible to determine the reasons for this surprising finding and related matters.

³ In this report, 'ethnicity' will be seen as socially noted culture and/or language and/or a sense of common ancestry that distinguishes a group of people. 'Race' will refer to visible and inherited physical differences of a group that are socially noted.

⁴ It might be noted that a study based on the 1986 census by DeSilva (1992) came to the conclusion that discrimination may account for the relatively low incomes of Caribbean blacks and some East Asians; however, when controls were introduced for education and Canadian experience there were no differences between the incomes of other visible minorities and individuals likely to be white.

First, the research found that in ascribing visible minority status, many Chinese origin students do not rely exclusively on physiological characteristics such as colour. Accent, perceived power of the group in question, numbers in the population, self-presentation, and cultural assertiveness were all seen as relevant criteria. As a result, some groups that might generally be viewed as white were nonetheless regarded by students of Chinese origin as members of visible minority groups. Second, it was discovered that students of Chinese origin used the same yardsticks when determining whether or not they were members of a visible minority group. Third, many students regarded visible minority as a derogatory expression. Moreover, many students opposed affirmative action programs because of: fear of backlash and aversion to reverse discrimination; belief in merit as a basis for hiring; self-esteem and/or ethnic pride; and feared negative organizational consequences. In an effort to determine if the concepts of Chinese origin students with regard to the expression visible minority were unique, and to see if the self-definitions of black students reflected general processes of racialization, similar focus group meetings were held with black students and white students of Italian and Portuguese origin.

Selection of Focus Group Members

In the analysis of students of Chinese origin it was relatively simple to select individuals for participation in focus group meetings. It was assumed that all who mentioned that they had spoken Chinese in the family when growing up would be of Chinese origin. Similar assumptions could not be made with regard to black students, many of whom grew up speaking English. As a result, two strategies were followed.

First, administrative records were examined to identify first year students who were citizens of African and Caribbean countries. It was assumed that the vast majority of such students would be black. Second, on-going student surveys that are carried out at York were examined for Canadian citizens who defined their minority status as black. On the basis of names selected from administrative records and from surveys along with administrative records, it was possible to convene eight focus group meetings of blacks of different origins. In the faculties of Arts and Pure and Applied Science meetings were held with black Canadians (many of whom were born in Caribbean countries but had acquired Canadian citizenship); Jamaican citizens; citizens of other Caribbean countries (e.g. citizens of Barbados, Trinidad/Tobago); and individuals who were citizens of African countries (e.g. Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia). Meetings with similar groups from Atkinson College were also carried out (Atkinson College is the evening operation of York University).

In total, 48 black students participated in eight focus group meetings that were led by the same black female facilitator. It is important to note that the facilitator was able to establish a good rapport in each group. As a result, students felt free to express their feelings on a number of sensitive issues. All meetings were taped and while transcriptions of the meetings were used for analysis, the full flavour of the meetings can only be appreciated by listening to the tapes. Indeed,

relying solely on transcriptions, as they do not capture nuances of language, would lead to a false impression of what transpired in group sessions.

Self-Designated Visible Minority Status

When it was possible to match citizenship information in first year students' records with self-defined minority status as determined in surveys, it was clear that the vast majority of students, 90%, who were citizens of Bahamas, Barbados, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, St. Lucia, Somalia, Tanzania, Trinidad/Tobago, Uganda, and Zambia classified themselves as visible minority group members. By way of comparison, only 57% of students who were citizens of China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam believed that they should be classified as visible minorities. The number of citizens of Sri-Lanka, India, and Pakistan who self-identified as visible minorities was a slightly higher 71%. It must be stressed that while such findings are interesting and consistent with the broader examination of students of Chinese origin referenced earlier, the absolute numbers involved are small (108) and can only be taken as suggestive of possible patterns. As a result, before definitive statements can be made, more detailed examination is required.

In focus group meetings students were asked directly if they considered themselves members of a visible minority group. In addition, after the completion of four focus group meetings, it was decided to ask students participating in the remaining four groups to complete a questionnaire dealing with matters raised in the meeting. Once again, while the absolute numbers involved are small, findings from focus groups and questionnaires are consistent with data obtained from surveys and administrative records.

From the focus group meetings it is clear the vast majority of participants, including Canadian blacks, regard themselves as members of visible minority groups. Nonetheless, questionnaire results indicate that while 82% of individuals in the focus groups regarded themselves as visible minorities, 14% did not, and 5% did not know whether or not they were members of a visible minority.

Other Visible Minority Groups

Groups that black students regard as visible minorities were determined in two ways: 1. by having students, at the beginning of the focus group session, write down those they considered to be visible minorities; 2. by students identifying in end-of-session questionnaires the three groups they considered most visible.

In total, as seen in Table 2, in method one, students made 162 unprompted, or spontaneous, identifications. Of these, the largest single percentage of references, 20%, were simply, 'black'. An additional 12.3% of all references were made up of: black Africans, West Indians, Africans, Afro-Americans, Afro-American females, black Caribbeans, black Canadians, and Mulattos. Hence, while the majority simply identify the category black, a reasonable percentage make finer distinctions of individuals who might also be black in colour. Chinese received only 12% of the spontaneous identifications.

Responses to the second method, questionnaires, are consistent with the foregoing but somewhat different in magnitude. For example, as in method one, blacks were the most frequently referenced category: 72% listed blacks as the most visible minority. When asked to identify the second most visible group 38% said Asians/Orientals and 25% Chinese; moreover when asked directly if individuals of Chinese origin were visible minorities, 82% said yes. Among other things this last finding suggests that the spontaneous replies of black students with regard to the visible minority status of various groups may differ substantially from replies given to direct questions (recall that Chinese received only 12% of spontaneous mentions).

While the data indicate that blacks, and other individuals likely to be considered black, comprise the largest single group of visible minority students for black students, the designation black received only 8.1% of the spontaneous mentions of Chinese origin students using method one in an earlier study (Grayson, 1994). When Jamaicans and Africans, the only other choices likely to be black, were added, the total number of potential blacks identified by students of Chinese origin increases only to 10.5%. By way of contrast, while Koreans received 11.3% of the mentions of students of Chinese origin, Koreans receive only 0.6% of the mentions of black students. Similarly, whereas Japanese received 9.7% of Chinese students' mentions, Japanese receive only 1.9% of the mentions of black students. Finally, while 16% of the mentions of Chinese origin students were of individuals likely to be white in colour - Russians, Italians, Czechs, etc. - only 4.4% of those mentioned by black students are likely to be white.

While these data should be treated with caution, they suggest that students of Chinese origin and black students may call to mind slightly different groups when considering those to be identified as visible minority group members. Chinese origin students are more likely to refer to other Asians while black students reference other blacks. This finding may provide some support for the notion that the more distant individuals are from one's own race/ethnicity, the less the likelihood of differentiating among them. In addition, some data suggest that individuals may call to mind different groups when asked to identify visible minorities without prompts (i.e. spontaneously) as compared to being asked particular questions regarding specific groups.

Table 2: Minority Group Identification by Students of Various Origins

	Jamaican	Canadian Black	African	Caribbean	Total	%
Black	9	10	6	7	32	20.0%
Chinese	6	6	2	5	19	12.0%
Spanish/Hispanic	9	6		2	17	10.0%
Asian	4	6	1	2	13	8.0%
Indians (Unspec.)	2	3	1	5	11	6.8%
Native Indian	2	4	2	3	11	6.8%
Oriental	2	4		3	9	5.5%
Women	2	1	1	1	5	4.0%
Black African	1	2	3		6	3.7%
East Indian	2	2	1	1	6	3.7%
West Indian	2	1		3	6	3.7%
Guys/Lesbians	1	1	1	1	4	2.5%
African	1		1	1	3	1.9%
Italian		3			3	1.9%
Japanese	1	1		1	3	1.9%
Jewish	2	1			3	1.9%
Physically Chal		1		2	3	1.9%
Afro-American	1			1	1	0.6%
Afro-American FM	1				1	0.6%
Black Caribbean		1			1	0.6%
Black Canadian		1			1	0.6%
Korean		1			1	0.6%
Mulatto				1	1	0.6%
Portuguese				1	1	0.6%
Teenagers			1		1	0.6%
Total	47	55	20	40	162	100%

Classification of Minority Group Members

It was clear from an analysis of students of Chinese origin based on replies to surveys and focus group meetings (Grayson, 1994) that the rationale for classifying individuals as visible minority group members fell into six categories:

- Colour and physical characteristics
- Accent
- Power
- Number in population
- Self-presentation
- Cultural assertiveness

An analysis of focus group discussions with black students revealed that with the exception of cultural assertiveness, similar considerations went into their classifications. A minority of black students also added the criteria of sexual orientation and gender.

COLOUR AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

By far, the single most common criterion for classifying individuals as members of a visible minority related to their colour and physical characteristics.⁵ As explained by one male African student, "My definition of a minority would be someone who's attributes are different from the attributes of the majority group." Consistent with this theme another African student argued that, "the African person or black person you would say he was a minority whether he was born here or not." At a more general level a female Canadian black student was of the opinion that "if you're not white, basically you're a minority. Whites," she continued, "are dominant. So everybody after that is a minority."

With regard to specific physical characteristics that result in identifying persons as visible minorities a female student from a Caribbean country listed "hair colour, hair type, and skin colour." Similarly, a Canadian black student put emphasis on "the pigmentation of their skin and their features." By way of example regarding the ways in which such characteristics may be applied to specific groups, a male African noted with respect to individuals of Chinese origin that "the fact that you might have slanting eyes and straight hair distinguishes you from the majority group; therefore, you're classified as a minority, a visible minority."

As was the case for students of Chinese origin, for some black students, certain individuals of European origin can be considered members of visible minority groups. For example, a female Canadian black student argued that, "a specific group of Italians are visible minorities, and they come from the south." The reason for this characterization is that "they are a darker shade."

⁵ All quotations are verbatim.

On some occasions disagreements arose among group participants regarding individuals of European origin who might be defined as visible minorities. More than anything else, such disagreements perhaps display confusion in peoples' minds regarding minority status that is based on ostensibly visible as compared to other criteria. For example, one male African student argued that "Ukrainians are still called visible minority." "No! No!" explained a frustrated co-participant. "Those are white! Those are white! Russians are still white!" Similar exchanges emerged when French Canadians living in northern Ontario were discussed.

ACCENT

Although it was of less importance to black students than to those of Chinese origin, accent played a role in identifying members of visible minority groups. When asked what characteristics define a visible minority, a Canadian black male, without hesitation, replied: "Accents." His rationale was that, "if it is not visible right away, it will become visible sooner or later." Along the same lines a female Jamaican student explained that if "you actually want to become a part of the people in Canada you have to, you know, speak like them." "If your way of communicating is with an accent," a Jamaican student speaking on the same issue believed, "they [presumably white Canadians] are going to penalize." It is important to note that disadvantages associated with accents were not restricted to blacks. As pointed out by a male African student, "there are a lot of white people here that will become visible as well," as a result of their accents. Those he mentioned specifically were Poles and Russians.

POWER

While power, both economic and political, was also mentioned less by black than by students of Chinese origin as a visible minority criterion, it clearly was a consideration for some. By way of example, an African male argued that "black men or African men and women I would consider minorities because they don't [have] wealth, neither do they own enough property." A Canadian black student also saw property as a criterion to be used in defining visible minorities; moreover, on this basis, he specified the Spanish as visible minorities. "A lot of times," he was convinced, "they equate black with Spanish and, say on the wealth list, they're not at the top or anything like that." Finally, with respect to political power, an African man who is not a Canadian citizen, told his group that "people like me don't have the vote." As a result, he feels that "I would be a visible minority."

NUMBER IN POPULATION

Several black students were sensitive to the fact that visible minority status, by definition, is a function of the overall composition of the population. "The visible minority," a Canadian black male student pointed out, "depends on what part of the world you are in." In another group an African male noted that globally, whites are a minority; however, "in Canada, we [blacks] are a minority."

SELF-PRESENTATION

In the analysis of students of Chinese origin, it was noted that Jews were treated with some ambiguity: some students classified them as white, and, as a result, not members of a visible minority group; others thought of some of them as visible, simply because of the dress of orthodox Jews. By and large the same considerations entered the discussions of black students on the few occasions that Jews were mentioned.

Consistent with the perspective of certain Chinese students, a Jamaican male commented that "some people consider [Jews] minorities while some consider them not really majority but *part* of the majority because they look white." Going one step further a Canadian black woman argued that "some of them can be *quite* visible if they are the orthodox Jew. They have," she explained, "the beards and the hats and the clothing. Even a lot of them wear the little caps."

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

One criterion raised by some black students that was virtually ignored by students of Chinese origin was sexual orientation. Nonetheless, there was less than consensus that gays and lesbians should be viewed as visible minorities. "Being black," one African student considered, "is natural. I am not sure whether being gay is." Along similar lines a Canadian black female student felt that "If you're thinking about a visible minority, you can't really tell sex or their sexual preference."

Considerations such as these aside, some students tended to consider gays and lesbians as visible minorities more because of their status than their visibility. In the words of one Canadian black female, "Because this group is so looked down upon in their sexual preferences and orientations," she believed "that makes them a minority in society." A Canadian black male went even further and directly compared the situation of gays and lesbians to that of other visible minorities. "If you think of their overall status in our society along with the blacks and Orientals and East Asians," he argued, "they're perceived to be below the status quo."

GENDER

A final criteria that was raised infrequently was gender. By way of example, a Canadian black woman, in defence of defining women as a visible minority, told her group, "Another reason why women are in the minority is for a long time and still now they're not given as much opportunities as men. Blacks," she continued, "they're not given the same opportunities as whites, although that's changing "

COLOUR

On some occasions, group participants identified themselves exclusively in terms of their racial category. "Being black is my very being," said one Canadian black female student. "It is what I am and I know nothing else but it." Most students, however, were not this categorical in their self-definitions.

COLOUR PLUS

For many individuals colour had a certain significance for their self-identify but it did not tell the whole story. The general connection between colour and other identifying characteristics was analyzed succinctly by a male African student. "When they look at us," he pointed out, "they only see black, but that doesn't mean they're right. They don't recognize," he continued, "the culture that goes with this colour." His concern was that "I want them when they see me to see a Somali. I want them to see an Ethiopian. I want them to see a Guyanan. I want them to see a Kenyan." Another African student pointed out that when referring to Africans the term black is questionable. "There's a wide variety of shading within the African people," he pointed out, "there's a lighter skin, dark, there's a chocolate-brown, there's a high yellow."

The comments of many Jamaican students clearly indicate that colour plays only a partial role in their sense of self. "My first impulse is black," stated a female Jamaican student; however, "if prodded further, I would say Jamaican." Another Jamaican, this time a male, stated that "it's between black and Jamaican. It depends on what you're talking about." This situational component of self definition is also clear in the comments of a female Jamaican. "If someone over the telephone asked," she noted, "then I would say I am black." On the other hand, "if is [sic] someone speaking to the person face-to-face, then I would say I am a Jamaican."

An even more complex relationship among colour, Jamaican ethnicity, and African ancestry is revealed in the comments of a Jamaican woman. "I am Jamaican first," she confidently asserts, "but if it is regards to our group of people," she is certain that "I would say I am black. But what I want to say," she continues, "is maybe that I am an African [too as] I have some linkages with Africans." The woman nonetheless concludes that, "I don't see why I should call myself an African or an Afro-Canadian."

The words of a St. Lucian female student indicate that the connections revealed in the words of African and Jamaican students regarding the relationship of colour to other considerations are fairly wide spread. "I call myself St. Lucian," she says, "cause I'm proud of where I'm from." As far as she is concerned, "It's obvious I'm black, so I always classify myself as St. Lucian."

'VISIBLE MINORITY' AS A DEROGATORY EXPRESSION

Although the vast majority of black students view themselves as members of visible minority groups, to a far greater degree than students of Chinese origin, many view the expression as derogatory. "It's very demeaning," an African male remarked. "I just don't like to be called visible minority." "I hate that word, I really hate that word," another African student emphasized.

Part of the reason for the aversion of many to being called a member of a visible minority group is suggested by a Canadian black male student when he commented that "I don't think the rest of the society sees us [visible minorities] in the same level as they see everybody else." Expressing similar feelings another Canadian black male student elaborated that "The implications of the word and the connotations to go along with minority is somehow petty." A female Jamaican student indicated that since she came to Canada "that term has been really reinforced for me 'cause I was always with the majority. But why," she asks, "put us in a class, aren't we all humans?"

Particularly some African students even seemed to view being called 'black' as derogatory. "It's an ignorant crowd that looks at you and calls you black," one man remarked. As far as he was concerned, "when they look at you and call you black, it's just like referring to Native Indians as 'Red Indians'." Expressing a similar sentiment another African male stated that, "If they don't want me to say Canadian, they better call me an African or an Ethiopian or something." In making these statements, African students were expressing sentiments common to many blacks that their identities involved more than classification in a common colour or visible minority category.

The Racial/Ethnic Identities of 'Black' Students

While some students included in this study consider themselves members of visible minority groups, the racial and ethnic identities of most are complex. Indeed, an analysis of focus group materials suggests that it is possible to postulate five general and often overlapping categories used by students when defining their identities.

- Colour
- Colour plus additional categories
- Culture
- Origin
- Citizenship

CULTURE

When students were asked to explain their identities many made quasi-mystical references to a number of factors that can be loosely grouped under the heading of culture. "I am an African," one male student explained. "It's very important that I come across as African. It explains the way I behave, the way I relate to other people. It's not only a name," he added, "it's a way of life. It's about identifying with people that have a history." Another African man felt that "If you're an African it's more powerful. It gives you more authority." In addition, he believes that "there's more power in being identified as an African than being identified as a black." Revealing an equal amount of primordial commitment a man told his group that "I consider myself as belonging to Zambia while living in Canada because of my culture and traditions and my ancestors all lie there."

Sentiments of a similar nature were voiced by a Canadian woman who was born in Jamaica. "Jamaica is our heritage," she intoned, "that is where we were born. If someone asks me I'll say to them I am a Jamaican, I will never say I am black or yellow or pink. Canada would be my home," she reasons, "but Jamaica is part of my heritage and you just can't forget your heritage, you can't give it up. It is," she concludes, "part of you." Later in the discussion the same woman continues her refrain. "There is a spirit about Jamaica," she says, "and if I was Guyanese there would be a spirit about Guyana. When I hear about Jamaica," she confesses, "there is a little tinge I get sometimes. I am just so proud of it despite all the other negative things that are associated with it."

Less on the mystical side, but nonetheless indicating that culture is a large component of self-definition, a Somali took somewhat of a contrary position. As far as he was concerned, "my African heritage comes first." By way of contrast, "black just doesn't cut it." Upon reflection he realized that "even African itself doesn't cut it." As a result he concluded that "I'll label myself as a Somalian first then as an African."

Many students expressed less mystical sentiments but nonetheless indicated that they defined themselves more in terms of culture than race. As one woman who characterized herself as Jamaican put it, "to be Jamaican means your language, your culture, and stuff like that." Another Jamaican woman made reference to "the culture, the food, just the whole idea of how we do things, how we fix things for ourselves as Jamaican kids."

ORIGIN

Although there is some degree of overlap with the previous category, many students emphasized origin as somewhat distinct from either colour or culture. For example, one female Canadian black stated that "I grew up here." Nonetheless, "I am one of those people who feel very saddened that I don't know enough about Jamaica. Even though I'm in my thirties now," the student wistfully continues, "I am still a Jamaican. I speak without an accent and people will say, 'well you don't sound like a Jamaican,' and I will say, 'but I am'." Expressing exactly the same

sentiment another Jamaican woman boasts that "I was born in Jamaica and I'm proud of that fact and," she impresses on her listeners, "I'll never give that up, no matter where I go, I'll always be Jamaican."

Even individuals who were born in Canada sometimes expressed similar notions suggesting a bond with other places. As one woman pointed out, "I was born in Canada. You know what?" she asks. "My parents were born in Jamaica. I live in Canada. But you know I feel like I need something more and it is not exactly my kind of home."

CITIZENSHIP

Consistent with these comments, few students viewed Canada as being part of their identity. Indeed, many noted that apart from the idea of diversity, they did not know what it meant to be Canadian. The handful who did identify as Canadian did so with little reflection. For example, one male student thought of himself as "Canadian basically." However, he confessed that "I don't really think about it. It's just the first thing that comes to mind." Similarly, a female student said that she considered herself Canadian "'cause this is all I've known."

One rare individual stated that he liked to be called "African-Canadian because Africa is the first place I am from. I consider the whole of Africa, the one nation," he elaborated. "That is why I feel I should be called African-Canadian as opposed to Ethiopian-Canadian."

By way of conclusion to this section it might be emphasized the data suggest that being black, the component that qualifies students included in the study for visible minority status, while important, is in many instances less important than particularly culture and/or origin in students' self-definition. Although the matter will not be dwelt on in this report, this finding reinforces the earlier contention that extensive use in language and law of the visible minority category is an example of racialization in which particularly the state is imposing questionable definitions on individuals of various backgrounds.

Affirmative Action

Attitudes toward affirmative action for blacks were assessed in four ways. First, attention focused on this issue in the focus group discussions. Second, after four of the groups, students were asked to indicate on questionnaires whether or not visible minorities should be given preference in hiring. The third and fourth methods required students to comment on a hiring situation involving a well-to-do black female and a disadvantaged white male in both the focus groups and in the questionnaire. The exact wording of the scenario will be given after the results of methods one and two have been presented.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WARRANTED

In the questionnaires filled out at the end of the focus groups, 68% of black students were in favour of affirmative action (employment equity) based on race, 23% were opposed, and the rest replied 'don't know'. These figures, although based on a limited number of cases, mirror discussions carried out in the groups. In this regard black students differed from those of Chinese origin because the latter, with the exception of a minority, opposed affirmative action based on race.

By and large, those who favoured affirmative action did so because of:

- A sense of historical injustice
- A sense of contemporary disadvantage

As was the case when other issues were discussed, there was considerable overlap between these categories.

A sense of historical injustice was clearly evident in the comments of a Caribbean male who argued that "I think because we've been kept back and cheated for so many centuries that it's time somebody does something to make it even. It might not be fair for other people more qualified," he continued, "but it's time to start over." Expressing similar sentiments a Jamaican male argued that "We deserve payment-[for our history here] by hiring us, giving us priorities. That's one way of trying to correct the wrong." These words were echoed by a Jamaican female who argued that blacks should be given preference "to pay back for all those injustices that happened to us so long ago."

For some students, affirmative action was necessary to correct contemporary disadvantages faced by visible minorities in the labour market. As noted by a Canadian black male, "We don't have the same opportunities as say the white race. We need the opportunities to prove that we can do the job." Another student in favour of affirmative action, an African male, pointed to the fact that most people get jobs through connections that do not exist for visible minorities. As a result, he felt that "we should be given special consideration."

While some students believed that visible minorities should be given jobs even if less qualified than other candidates, not all shared this view. For example, one Canadian black male student who supported affirmative action because of the contemporary disadvantage faced by visible minorities in the job market nonetheless clarified that "I'm not saying that if you or say if two people are going for a job and it requires a BA, say a white person has the BA and a black person might not have that BA, I'm not saying to hire the black person." But like many others, this student believed that "if they're both equally qualified, I think the black person should be given the opportunity to do the job." "I totally agree," a fellow student affirmed, "because you know in the past if those same two guys were going for the job, the black man wouldn't even have this sort of chance."

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION NOT WARRANTED

Of individuals opposed to affirmative action, the largest single group based their opposition on equity principles. "I really don't agree with minorities having special consideration," one African man remarked. A female Caribbean student expressed a comparable opinion when she stated that "I think having the qualifications in a job you should get it no matter what colour you are." The comment of a Jamaican woman that "I don't think anybody should get the preference in terms of race," is similar.

A minority of students opposed affirmative action because, in the words of an African man, "that sound a little like reverse discrimination. I believe," he elaborated, "everybody should be treated on a single flat plain and whoever the best candidate for the job gets the job." This belief was echoed by a Jamaican man who stated that "I think when you hire someone because they're black it is the same as not hiring them *because* they're black."

A few students had idiosyncratic concerns. Concerned with the impact on productivity, a Jamaican male remarked that "the only reason why I would hire someone because they're black as long as I know it can make my company better. I'm not just gonna hire you," he emphasized, "cause you're black." Another Jamaican man stated that "I'm also worried about how people view our race. I'm not just worried about, like, getting a job."

A JOB SCENARIO

It is one thing to discuss affirmative action in the abstract. It is another to present students with a situation in which any disadvantage associated with race and gender is potentially offset by class. The latter brings into play equity matters not considered in Bill 79.

In both the focus group meetings and in the questionnaires students were asked who in the following scenario should be given preference in hiring.

Peter is the son of an unemployed white miner from Sudbury. His dad lost his job in 1989 and only has had part-time jobs since then. Last year he earned under \$20,000. While his parents had hoped that all of their children would go to college or university, both of his sisters stopped their education after grade 12.

Cheryl is the daughter of a prominent black lawyer in Toronto who earned \$200,000 in 1993. She went to a private school and later completed her studies at the University of Toronto, the same school from which her two brothers graduated.

Both Peter and Cheryl have just completed their degrees in sociology. Both are A students. Both are applying for the same job in the Ministry of Labour for which they are equally qualified.

What best describes your feelings regarding who should get the job?

As noted earlier, questionnaire responses indicated that 68% of black students were in favour of affirmative action based on race. An even higher 77% believed in affirmative action based on gender. Nonetheless, when presented with the above scenario in which it could be interpreted that class and not visible minority status or gender conferred disadvantage, 69% of students stated that they did not know who should be given preference in hiring. Thirteen percent said Peter should be given preference and 19% Cheryl.

Before analyzing how students dealt with the same scenario in the focus group discussions it is worth noting that had reliance been placed solely on points raised in the focus group meetings, the likely conclusion that would have emerged was that most students would have been inclined to prefer Cheryl over Peter. Replies on the questionnaire, however, suggest that the majority of students don't know who should be given preference. This situation provides an excellent illustration of why in the study of some subjects focus group meetings should be combined with surveys: the former provide depth, the latter breadth.

Not surprisingly, focus group materials suggest that those who thought that preference should be given to Cheryl believed in the primacy of race over class. To quote a male African student, "Stopping that girl from getting that job that would be putting down one more black person." Another African man commented that "I think she should be given the preference." The reason? "If she goes elsewhere nobody is going to look at her because she is black." In a slightly different vein a male Caribbean student who was not to be swayed by class over race pointed out that "I could tell you a story about Leroy whose father was unemployed."

By way of comparison, the few arguments supporting Peter concentrated on his disadvantaged position and the fact that Cheryl came from a relatively privileged position. At the same time it was noted by one student that advantages such as those enjoyed by Cheryl were rare for black people.

Overall, it is clear that the vast majority of black students support affirmative action based on race and gender. At the same time, it can be inferred that for many such support is based on the automatic assumption that visible minority status and being female confer disadvantage on individuals in the labour market. While under many circumstances these may be reasonable assumptions, when confronted with a situation in which class was also a consideration, many became uncertain with regard to their former preferences. Unfortunately, it can be argued that Bill 79 tends to reinforce the simplistic notion that disadvantages are restricted to those of race and gender.

Conclusion

In Canada in general, and in Toronto in particular, in recent years a process of racialization has led to the social construction of a 'visible minority' category of non-white individuals. This construct is both used in language and recognized in laws such as Bill C62 and Bill 79, each of which has the intent of removing racial, gender, and other barriers in employment. While these may be laudable objectives, both side-step inequalities based on class.

Among other things, the study of York students described in this report indicates that while in our everyday conversation and in law there may be an assumption that the meaning of visible minority is self-evident, it means different things to different people. For example, while colour and physical characteristics were foremost in the minds of black students when expressing their ideas on the meaning of visible minority, accent, power, number in the population, self-presentation, sexual orientation, and gender were other possible components of visible minority status. In this regard black students were similar to students of Chinese origin studied earlier.

Although the majority of black students regarded themselves as members of a visible minority group, many felt that the expression visible minority had a negative connotation. Moreover, it was clear that most black students did not exclusively define themselves in terms of their colour; equally, if not more, important were considerations related to culture and origin. To this extent it can be argued that black students at one level may not accept racializing processes that tend to place individuals in broad racial categories.

Despite this possibility, most black students studied supported affirmative action based on race and gender; however, when confronted with a situation in which class can also be seen to confer disadvantage, their support for affirmative action was substantially reduced. In this respect they show more sensitivity to the general issue of inequality than is embodied in legislation.

As noted throughout the report, in some instances analyses were based on small numbers of cases; nonetheless, findings based on different methodologies tend to support one another. As a result, although further confirmation is called for, we are able to come to some tentative conclusions with regard to concepts of visible minority status, identity, and support for affirmative action. This said, it is clear that conclusions based on a study of students at one university cannot be generalized to the overall population. As a result, similar studies are anticipated of the residents of Metropolitan Toronto.

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